

CNN's "New Day"
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Speakers:

U.S. Senator Susan Collins (R-ME)

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV)

Chris Cuomo, CNN host

CUOMO: Let's talk about unity with Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine and Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. They are the newly announced honorary co-chairs of No Labels, a group advocating bipartisan solutions in Washington. How come all the other lawmakers aren't throwing stones at you two right now on my show here on "New Day."

COLLINS: It's still early.

CUOMO: Yeah, that's right. They are not up yet. Let's start with you, Senator Collins, it's good to have you both on the show as always. So, what is this No Labels thing about? What is your hope for No Labels?

COLLINS: Our hope is that with the support of members of No Labels all across our country that we can begin a process of bringing people together in Washington to listen respectfully to one another and forge bipartisan solutions. When legislation is passed with input from both parties, we get far better products in the end. We recognize that this is the first step, but we want to energize the middle. I am convinced that most Americans want us to work together and yet the debate in Washington is too often hyperpartisan and driven by the ideological groups on the far left and the far right rather than the sensible center.

MANCHIN: Let me just --

CUOMO: Please, senator.

MANCHIN: When I first came in November of 2010 after the death of Senator Bryd, and I was a two-term governor and I made the decision to come and people were kind enough to send me here, the only group I found that was willing to look for the middle and to try to find a pathway forward and find solutions was No Labels. It was Democrats and Republicans, it was CEOs, it was rank and file people that are just interested in their country. And it has grown and grown and I've been involved ever since. Susan's always been there listening and working with us, and now coming on as the co-chair, I just could not have a better partner. It was Susan and I in 2013 when the government shut down that started looking for a pathway forward. It was hurting the people of West Virginia and Maine. We were able to bring a bipartisan group together to find that pathway to open the government back up. Just recently the Affordable Care Act, we saw what happened there. And it was Susan and I now that signed on the bill with Patty Murray and Lamar Alexander, and we have a good piece of legislation that will pass immediately. Whenever Mitch McConnell puts it on the floor, it's going to pass.

CUOMO: That's a big if, Senator. Let me infuse some cynicism into this unheralded optimism coming at me on the show this morning. It's not coming to a vote anytime soon from our latest reporting. And you see what is going on with taxes. There seems to be stakes out of division even within the GOP, let alone when it comes to the Democrats. How do you deal with these entrenched challenges Susan Collins or Joe Manchin?

COLLINS: First of all, I think we are going to see a very healthy debate on overhauling our tax code, which is desperately needed and has not been done since 1986. We do need to provide tax relief to hard-working middle-income families and to our small businesses. This bill appears to accomplish some of those goals. We are still waiting for it to be unveiled, but here's the difference: the tax bill—unlike the health care bill—is going to go through a full markup in the Senate Finance Committee, where both Democrats and Republicans will be able to offer their ideas, to debate the issues, and to amend the bill. That's the way the process should work. And that's very different from the way the health care bills were crafted.

MANCHIN: Chris, this is the first time in the history of the United States of America that we have ever used a budget reconciliation to do a major policy overhaul.

CUOMO: Explain why people should care about that, by the way?

MANCHIN: First of all, it brings it down to a 51 vote margin, and basically any party in power is going to have the 51 vote margin. So you can do it simply the same as the House does it with a simple majority. That's not the way the framers of this great country set the Senate up in a bicameral way. Susan and I both believe that our parties, our respective sides, are wrong when they try to go it alone. We both believe that and we've always reached across to see how we could find a group of people that want to work in the middle. That's really what No Labels has always been. Everything No Labels does is in a bipartisan way; it's not from one side, ideologically, or the other, and that's what we like about that. That's why we are proud to be part of it. We are looking for that. Now Susan says we are gonna go into this, and if they go into it openly looking for basically to energize and make it better, a better piece of legislation that we help the middle class, that we really help the working class and we really help small businesses, and we don't continue to pile on more debt for our children and future generations, then we can come out with a good product, and we are hoping that's where the president will be. As a Democrat I want to work with the president and I want us to be successful, but I am going to be true to who I am and my people who I represent as West Virginians. They want to see some relief on their paycheck. When they see the bottom line of that paycheck, do they have any more and are you going to make their children pay for what they're getting today?

CUOMO: You had a 51 vote trigger on the reconciliation effort for health care, and that wasn't enough to get it done Susan Collins.

COLLINS: That's true, and I think it's because that those bills did not go through any kind of hearing process despite the fact that they were making sweeping changes and cuts.

CUOMO: So that's the difference. You need the mark -- the difference fundamentally with what you are proposing, you can't just go to the vote and have it done in that smoky room

environment. You have to have a markup, you have to have a debate, you have to do it the hard way, and then the 51-vote trigger becomes efficacious.

MANCHIN: Here's what I am concerned about, if I can, I'm concerned that what the House just went through, a so-called markup, but it was right down party lines. Every amendment was voted down party lines either for or against. The Senate has more or less tried to always find and balance it out a little better. So we have to hope that this markup is open. When you have people like Susan Collins or John McCain and people that know what this institution is about and are going to vote what they believe is right, that makes the Senate just a little bit different.

COLLINS: Chris, I am not saying that our partnership with No Labels is going to solve every problem involving hyperpartisanship and divisiveness in this country. Obviously it's not. But what is exciting to me, is that there is an energized group of people who are in the center and they are willing to start backing and working with those of us who have always believed that compromise and listening to others produces better legislation.

MANCHIN: Chris, as Susan always says, we are in the radical middle.

CUOMO: Anything compromise driven would be radical right now. Let me ask you, though—let me put something else on your plate. There's all this talk about existential threat coming from North Korea, and I am not saying it's unfounded, and yet there's still foot dragging on open debate and accountability for an authorization for the use of military force. You had General Mattis go in there, and he gave you guys a political opinion about whether or not you should have one. That's not how the Constitution works. That's not how this legislative duty works. You are not supposed to be taking his take on whether or not there should be legislation. That's on you guys. Do you think that you can help generate a real debate where the American people can see their representatives discuss what force should be used, where our blood and treasure should be expended?

MANCHIN: I truly do, and I have supported AUMF reauthorization. I think we need to sit down and represent people in my state of West Virginia who thinks 16 years is too long. What is the end game? How do you exit? Is there ever going to be an exit? How much toll are we going to take? How much blood are we willing to shed and how much treasure are we going to spend? This is something very much concerning to the people of West Virginia. Are we getting drug into another one? Syria, we're over into Syria. And who is coming out ahead on Syria? Is it going to be Iran? Is it going to be Russia? And then China with North Korea. Why isn't China engaging and why are they still sitting on the sidelines, and why are they allowing a nation that totally depends on them and not putting their foot down and saying this kind behavior is not going to be accepted? We need to be able to say if this doesn't happen this is what we think we should be doing. It's far past 16, 17 years that we needed a new AUMF.

COLLINS: Congress has really abdicated its constitutional responsibility in this area. You're absolutely right. I know there have been a lot of hearings in the Foreign Relations Committee, but we need to move forward. It is our responsibility. It is also an important part of the checks and balances that were built into the Constitution. We recognize that the president is the commander-in-chief. Obviously he has the authority to respond to an imminent threat against our

country, but we are talking about the long-term engagement of troops potentially and a strategy for dealing with everything from the ongoing terrorism threat to North Korea, and that's a debate we should be having in Congress.

MANCHIN: We also, Chris, can identify the imminent threat because people are concerned what an imminent threat might be to me or to Susan or to Congress might be different to the executive branch. These are things that we can put clarity to, and we should.

CUOMO: Can, should. Usually a big space between the two. We look forward to any progress. Everybody says we are better than this. We are only as good as what we do. Senator Joe Manchin, Senator Susan Collins, a formidable duo. We wish you well.

COLLINS & MANCHIN: Thank you.